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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the cooperative role of parents and public libraries in stimulating reading interests in children of all ages, this booklet addresses the following issues: (1) getting children interested in reading (reading aloud to children; encouraging children to read to you; starting a home library; showing children that you enjoy reading; choosing books that you both like; looking for award-winning books; asking for help at the local library); (2) children visiting the library with parents or alone (including children, even toddlers, in weekly trips to the library; helping children get their own library cards; encouraging children to ask the librarian for help; setting rules and guidelines for children when they visit the library alone); and (3) library services (for preschool children including infants, toddlers 18-36 months old, and children 3-5 years; school age children, especially ages 7-9 years; teenagers; and special children, the gifted and the handicapped). A postscript briefly discusses adult services and a listing of sources for additional information is provided. (CGD)

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Helping Your Child Use the Library

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When I was a youngster, I remember seeing, in my mind's eye, the whole world spread out before me. One fine day I escaped from my dull town, and with two boys of my own age, Andre and Julien, traveled all over France through the pages of a beautiful book. Another time, led by Don Quixote and Sancho, I saw the plains of Castile, white-hot in the sun, with dusty roads and inns full of adventure. In my imagination I saw desert isles, the northern lights on the sea. I visited the pigmy country in Africa, which did not seem strange to me as I was familiar with Lilliput. I lived in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and cultivated sugar cane with black slaves as companions. Like Baron Munchausen, I fastened a rope to the crescent moon so I could glide to earth, and the rope being too short I cut it above me to attach it to the end which was hanging under my feet. I went everywhere with Jules Verne, even to the very bottom of the ocean.

And so it comes about that in our first impressionable years the universal republic of childhood is born. The only rivalry in those days was in the color and picturesque quality. Beautiful stories grew to completion, doing no harm to one another, mingling harmoniously. All was peace and unity.

Paul Hazard
from ***Books, Children and Men****

You don't have to have a house overflowing with books to give your children this kind of experience. Your local public library is home to an abundance of books, plus many other valuable resources.

One of the most exciting and innovative areas in the library today is the children's section. Not only do

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most libraries now offer a wide variety of children's books and magazines, but there is often a specially trained children's librarian to help find just the right book—whether it's Mother Goose or how to do a science project. Most libraries will also lend records, tapes, and videocassettes of children's books and movies. And they often sponsor special programs, including story hours for youngsters (from toddlers on up), summer reading programs, and homework help. Many libraries also provide valuable resources for teenagers, such as term paper "clinics" and information and referral services, although teenagers will probably use these services more independently than the younger kids.

Keep in mind, too, that a visit to the library can help enrich your life as an adult. Whether you are seeking information or just a "good read," your public library has a lot to offer.

Getting Children Interested

Helping your children enjoy reading is one of the most important things you can do as a parent and well worth the investment of your time and energy. Kids will learn reading skills in school, but often they come to associate reading with work, not pleasure. As a result, they lose their desire to read. And it is that desire—the curiosity and interest—that is the cornerstone to using reading and related skills successfully.

By far the most effective way to encourage your children to love books and reading is to **read aloud to them**, and the earlier you start, the better. Even a baby of a few months can see pictures, listen to your voice, and turn cardboard pages. Make this time together a special time when you hold your children and share the pleasure of a story without the distractions of TV or

telephones. You may be surprised to find that a well-written children's book is often as big a delight to you as it is to the kids.

And don't stop taking the time to read aloud once your children have learned to read for themselves. At this stage, **encourage them to read to you** some of the time. This shared enjoyment will continue to strengthen your children's interest and appreciation.

Simply having books, magazines, and newspapers around your home will help children to view them as part of daily life. And your example of reading frequently and enjoying it will reinforce that view.

While your children are still very small, it's a good idea to start a **home library** for them, even if it's just a shelf or two. Be sure to keep some books for little children to handle freely. Consider specially made, extra-durable books for infants, and pick paperbacks and plastic covers for kids who are older but still not quite ready for expensive hardbacks. Allowing little children to touch, smell, and even taste books will help them to develop strong attachments.

How you handle books will eventually influence how your kids treat them. Children imitate, so if they **see that you enjoy reading** and treat books gently and with respect, it is likely that, in time, they will do the same.

When you read aloud together, **choose books that you both like.** If a book seems dull, put it down and find one that is appealing.

There are, however, so many children's books in print that making the best selections may seem a formidable task. One approach is to **look for award-winning books.** There are two famous awards for children's literature made each year by the American Library Association that are good indicators of quality

work: the Caldecott Medal for illustration and the Newberry Medal for writing. But these are given to only two of the approximately 2,500 new children's books published each year.

Fortunately there is a lot of other good help available. For instance, there are lists of books recommended by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress and some excellent books to guide parents (see the section "For More Information").

The best help of all, though, is at your neighborhood library. If you are not familiar with the library, **don't hesitate to ask for help.** The children's librarian is trained to help you locate specific books, books that are good for reading aloud, and books on a particular subject recommended for a particular age group. The library also has many book lists, including ones like those mentioned above and probably some published by the library itself.

In addition, your library will have several journals that regularly review children's books, including *The Horn Book* and *Booklist*. These will give you an idea of what's new and worth pursuing. And there's nothing like just browsing through the many books available at your library until you find ones that appeal to you and your kids.

If your children are school-aged, keep in mind that the school library is an excellent source for a wide variety of materials and the school librarian is knowledgeable about children's literature. Encourage your kids to bring home books from their school library for pleasure as well as for their studies.

When You Visit the Library

As soon as you can, it is a good idea to **include children—even toddlers—in weekly trips to the library.** Libraries are often open in the evening and most will issue a library card to any children who can print their names and whose parent will countersign for them. See that your children get **their own library cards** as soon as possible so that they can check out their own books.

Also, it's a good idea to **encourage your kids to ask** on their own for help in finding books and materials. Keep in mind, however, that a librarian is there to point out different choices, not to decide what ideas your children should be exposed to. That is your job. So, no matter how helpful or knowledgeable a children's librarian may be, your participation in selecting and sharing books with your youngsters is very important.

Although public libraries welcome children and usually have special facilities for them, there are some common-sense guidelines for behavior that parents need to stress:

- Library books are everybody's property and should be treated carefully.
- Be sure that you and your children know the library's policies regarding loan periods and fines for overdue books.
- Explain to your kids that the library is there for the whole community and they need to be considerate of others' needs.

Keep in mind that it is your responsibility to see that your children behave acceptably and are not disruptive to others using the library.

When Your Child Visits the Library Alone

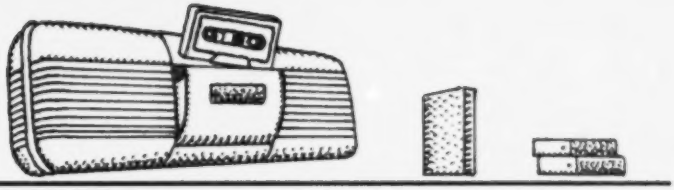
Recently public libraries have seen a dramatic increase in the number of elementary school-aged children—and even preschoolers—left unattended. Frequently, working parents are instructing their youngsters to go to the library after school and do homework until they can pick them up several hours later.

This trend has produced some unfortunate results. For instance, kids have been left in unsafe areas at closing time when their parents were late picking them up. In addition, leaving children unattended at public libraries for long periods can be disruptive for other patrons. Kids who were hungry, tired, or restless have gotten noisy, upset, and have even vandalized library property.

Consequently, many public libraries have adopted policies regarding how they will respond to children who are left unsupervised for long periods, particularly when there are questions of safety or liability. The policies of different libraries vary considerably, so if you have any questions, be sure to ask a staff member at your library.

Preschool children visiting a library should always be accompanied by an adult or teenager. Some suggestions for parents of older children who will be visiting the library include:

- Remember that the library is a public building. Librarians are busy and are not able to supervise your kids.
- Teach your children how to take care of themselves in public places, including how to deal with strangers, what situations are dangerous, and what to do if they feel threatened.



- Assess whether your children are comfortable being at the library for long periods. If going directly from school, do they need something to eat or some kind of physical or social outlet first?
- Instruct your children on how to be considerate of others using the library.
- Always pick up your children at least 30 minutes before closing time. In case you are delayed, give your children an alternative plan, such as calling a neighbor for a ride home.

All of these guidelines and policies are designed to protect children, not discourage them from visiting libraries. Kids are welcome.

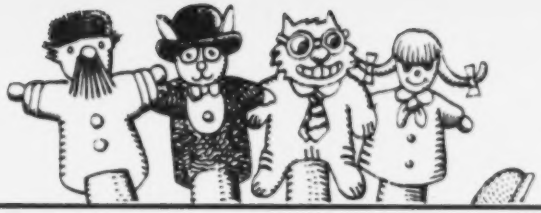
Library Services

So what exactly can you expect if you take your children to the library? A lot depends, of course, on their ages. And a lot depends on your local public library's resources. The best way to find out is to visit your community library and see what's available. While there is much variety in local library programs throughout the country, there are several elements common to most children's services, as well as some general trends in new programs.

For Preschoolers

Until very recently, libraries offered little or nothing for children below the age of 3. But in the last few years, more and more libraries are introducing programs for **infants.**

"Catch 'em in the Cradle," a popular program that originated in Florida, is one such effort, and libraries throughout the country are copying it. New parents receive library information kits through hospitals, adoption centers, and even prenatal classes. These kits



generally contain information on how to stimulate a baby's language development through games, songs, and other activities. They also include lists of books for babies, books on parenting, and, of course, the address and hours of the local library. If there is no such program in your area and you'd like an information kit, ask the librarian at your local public library for help in putting one together.

A few libraries invite parents to bring in their children—no matter how young—for special programs, such as parent–child story hours in the evening. Here parents can learn fingerplays, songs, rhymes, and other activities they can use at home to entertain and stimulate their infants.

More and more libraries are instituting programs designed for **toddlers 18 to 36 months old.** Again, parents and children participate in activities that may include reading aloud, storytelling, fingerplays, rhymes, and songs. Because this age is a crucial time in the development of language skills, the value of these events lies as much in giving parents or caregivers the background on how to stimulate and encourage a child's development as it does in entertaining the toddlers.

By the time children are **3 to 5 years of age**, they usually enjoy participating in group activities. Consequently, many libraries sponsor programs for this age group, and parents generally do not need to stay with their kids throughout these events. Popular activities include reading aloud, storytelling, films, puppet shows, arts and crafts, and reading programs. Frequently, reading programs offer some kind of recognition—perhaps a certificate or book—to children who have read (or listened to) a specified number of books.

It is also worth noting that many libraries now offer special **training programs for childcare**

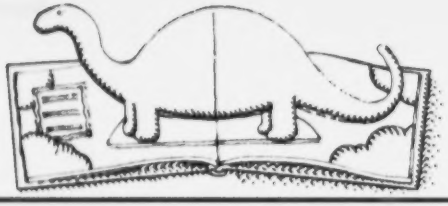
workers and even invite large groups of children from daycare centers in for special programs, such as storytelling and read-alouds. If you have children in daycare, be sure that the caregivers contact the local public library to plan such activities. Exposure to books and to reading should be an integral part of daycare activities, and the public library is the best resource available for developing and enriching such programs.

The kinds of **materials available for checkout** for children ranging from infants up to age 5 vary among libraries. There will always be books, though—hardbacks, books with cardboard pages, picture books, and often cloth books, paperbacks, and magazines. The variety of subjects is tremendous, with everything from baby colors to bicycle basics, and from Bambi to keeping bugs in a jar. When your kids ask you endless questions about where they came from and why the sky is blue, chances are good there's a book at your library with answers they can understand. Or, if your children have homed in on favorite subjects—whether dinosaurs or donkeys—you'll find lots of fascinating books for them at the library.

Almost all libraries also offer recordings of children's stories and songs. Many also offer cassette tapes, videotapes, book/cassette kits, and even puppets and educational toys. **See what your local public library has to offer.** You and your kids may be pleasantly surprised. And the only thing it will cost you is some time.

For School-Aged Children

Libraries take on another important dimension for children beginning school. In addition to recreation, the library is a place to find information, usually for help with schoolwork.



This expanded focus in no way diminishes the library's importance as a source of pleasure. Most libraries offer a variety of programs for children to fill that bill. For elementary school children, there are variations of the read-alouds and storytelling hours that often include **discussions and presentations by the children themselves,** as well as summer reading programs. For middle and junior high school kids, there may also be book discussions, summer reading programs, creative writing seminars, drama groups, and poetry readings.

But the books are central. The **ages 7 to 9** are an especially critical time for children. These are the years when they normally make the transition from just hearing and looking at picture books to reading independently for enjoyment and for schoolwork. How well they make this transition will determine much about the quality of their lives.

It is very important to find well-written books for your children at this stage. A story that will make them laugh or want to know what happens next **will motivate them to read** even though it's difficult. Your local public library is filled with such books, and the children's librarian is skilled at locating these treasures. A growing number of very informative nonfiction books are available as well. Want to know how to dig up dinosaur bones or all about the different people in the world? There are good books that will fascinate even beginning readers.

Hopefully, that sense of wonder and curiosity behind little children's endless questions will continue as your kids grow older. **Encourage them to look up answers** to their questions in dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, and almanacs. These are resources you may want to add to your home library. Even if you do, remember that your local library will have a larger

selection and more materials on specific subjects, and the librarian will be glad to help your kids learn to use these resources.

And **don't overlook the school library** as another valuable source for similar information and training. In fact, many schools and public libraries cosponsor children's programs. For example, a school may invite staff members from the local public library to give book talks or sign children up for library cards.

In elementary and junior high school, your children will tackle school assignments that require them to learn library skills. Teaching these skills is, in fact, part of the school curriculum. When you visit your children's school, stop by the school library, meet the librarian, and familiarize yourself with its many resources. In addition, if your kids' school sponsors book fairs, don't miss the opportunity to participate. You will probably be invited to help with the collecting, displaying, buying, and selling of children's books. This is an excellent way to learn more about children's literature.

Very often children in school will ask their parents for **help with library assignments.** And very often parents will find themselves gradually taking over and doing a report for their son or daughter. Obviously, such an exercise offers no long-term benefit to anyone. There are, however, things you can do to help your kids with library assignments:

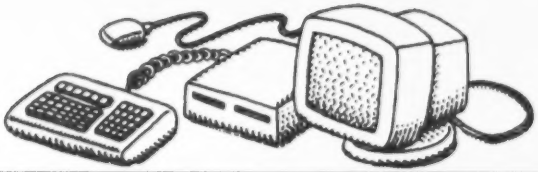
- Ask your children questions about the assignment and encourage them to ask their teachers questions. This helps children to clarify what they're trying to do. Help them to identify smaller components of the topic they're researching or to see the topic as part of a larger topic (brontosaurus is a subgroup of dinosaurs, which is a subgroup of extinct animals). These

classifications will help them to identify useful references.

- Suggest that they look up the topic in the library catalog, periodical guides, and reference books. The librarian will direct them and help them get started. Be sure they know how to use a table of contents and index. Suggest they start with something general about the subject and be prepared to consult more than one source.
- Help them to break assignments into logical segments and avoid last-minute panics by setting deadlines for each phase of the work. Allow them plenty of time to gather the materials they need.
- Help them to determine if the community library has the resources they need or if they should check other information sources.
- Encourage your kids to ask the librarian for help in locating needed materials, and let the children do their own talking.
- Give them encouragement, advice, and a ride if they need it, but resist the temptation to take over an assignment. Let your children assume responsibility for researching and writing reports. It's the only way they'll learn the library skills that they can use all their lives.

In many areas libraries have special services for helping kids with school assignments, such as **homework hotlines and term paper "clinics."** Check what's available at your local public library.

One of the most important and frequently available library services for school-aged children is the summer reading program. Recent research has shown that kids who participate in library summer reading programs begin the school year with stronger reading



skills than those who don't. So, encourage your kids to participate in such programs, particularly if they have any difficulty with reading. Low-level reading skills and illiteracy are being recognized more and more as major obstacles to success for many young adults. Obviously, the more help youngsters get early on, the better.

The increasing number of **computer software programs** available at public libraries are of particular interest to school children. Since kids generally are more interested and at ease with computers than their parents, computers are often found in the children's section as well as the adult department. Many public libraries offer training courses for children in computer languages, programming, graphics, and the like. Be sure your kids—especially your teenagers—know what's available at your local public library.

For Teenagers

Teenagers, of course, are more independent than younger kids, so parents will have a somewhat different role when it comes to helping them use the library and encouraging them to read for recreation. Just being certain that teenagers know what kinds of programs are available may be the best help you can give—that, along with setting the example of visiting the library and reading yourself.

There is no clearcut category of books for teenagers or young adults, although there are many novels written especially for teenagers, usually published in paperback. Many libraries do not have special sections for this age group, and those that do offer mostly a combination of young adult and adult fiction. Teens generally make selections, especially for school assignments, from the adult collection. Thus, the range of choice is broad. In addition to books and magazines,

many libraries offer records and movie videocassettes free on loan.

A number of public libraries have developed special programs for teens to help them as they make the transition into adulthood. For instance, at some libraries there are teenage advisory boards to ensure that programs and materials for youths actually meet their needs. Some libraries publish book reviews written by their teenage patrons or help young people in the community to publish their own newsletters or magazines.

Many libraries enlist teenagers to help with programs for younger children, such as tutoring summer reading participants, doing puppet and crafts shows, storytelling, and theater productions. In addition, libraries frequently offer part-time job opportunities for teens, both volunteer and paid, to help with such tasks as checking in books and restocking shelves.

Finally, the local public library can help young people seeking **information on very serious, personal choices.** There is information on school and career planning, including choosing a college and financial aid. Many libraries distribute educational materials on drugs and alcohol for children and parents. Many others act as referral agencies to other community resources, including counseling centers and runaway services. And always there is an abundance of books.

Services for Special Children

If your children are **gifted and talented**, you may find that helping them to use the library offers special benefits and challenges. Gifted children usually have a love for reading and are able to learn on their own and advance to higher level materials at an earlier age. They tend to have a great deal of curiosity and desire for answers on a variety of subjects, so that they need access to a wide range of sophisticated sources of information. The public library can be a "learning laboratory" for these children, and very often they can make good use of its resources with relatively little assistance. However, if you want specific guidance for your gifted children, do not hesitate to ask the librarian for suggestions. Also, be sure to check with their school librarian who should be involved with the teachers in curriculum development and able to recommend supplemental library materials.

If your children are handicapped in any way, don't let this discourage you from introducing them to the world of books in your community library. Most public libraries are accessible to **physically handicapped** individuals, and many have programs specially designed to serve people, including little ones, who are developmentally disabled, hearing-impaired, blind, or physically handicapped.

The kinds of library services vary greatly for children who have **learning disabilities** or who are **mentally retarded.** To find out what's available in your area, the best starting point is your local public library. If its programs do not address the special needs of your children, perhaps the librarian can refer you to other area libraries that do. Or, perhaps you can work with library staff to help meet your children's needs. Ask if they have seen the materials for library

professionals working with youngsters who have learning difficulties, recently published by the Association for Library Services to Children (see the section "For More Information").

As more mentally retarded individuals are living outside of institutions and in the community, more public libraries are working to integrate them into their programs.

In some places there are successful programs, such as booktalks and storytelling, carefully designed to suit the interests and developmental levels of mentally retarded children, as well as bibliographies of books to use with these children. If such services do not exist in your community, check with the local chapter of the Association for Retarded Citizens, a group home director, special education teacher, or your State library. While developmentally disabled youngsters may need special help, they have much to gain through reading and using library resources. So, it's well worth your extra effort to let library personnel know about your children's special needs and abilities.

Hearing-impaired children, of course, have considerable difficulty with the world of communication. Consequently, their education suffers, and the average hearing-impaired student progresses at about one-third the rate of the hearing student in reading comprehension development. Helping your deaf child to read and use the library can be very beneficial, as well as challenging. Again, there is no uniformity among library programs nationwide.

There are, however, many libraries with staff members who use sign language or are trained to work with hearing-impaired people. Some libraries have

*Pooh Bear

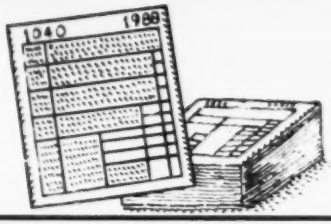
information and referral services that may be called via Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs). Some even lend out TDDs and Television Telecaption Decoders. Check with your local library or State library to find out what services are available in your area.

There are a variety of **free** library services available for children, as well as adults, who are **blind or physically handicapped.** The National Library Service (NLS) of the Library of Congress provides the majority of such services. Working through a nationwide network of cooperating regional libraries, NLS offers Braille and talking book services free of charge to any person who is unable to read because of limited vision or who is physically unable to hold a book or turn a page.

You can apply to the regional library on behalf of your child. Should you have any difficulty locating a participating library near you, ask for help at your local public library or write to the NLS (see the section "For More Information").

Although NLS has a larger collection for adults, its offerings for children are extensive. There are hundreds of children's books in Braille, print/Braille, cassette and disc formats. Included are picture books and popular fiction and nonfiction at varying levels of interest and difficulty for children in preschool through junior high. There are also children's magazines and even music instruction materials available. The philosophy behind NLS' efforts is that blind and physically handicapped children are entitled to the same range of reading materials as their nonhandicapped classmates and friends.

The same philosophy extends to NLS's adult services, which are also available to teenagers who read at the high school level and beyond. NLS is charged by Congress to provide only popular types of literature, so



if you want textbooks or reference materials, check with NLS for other sources of assistance.

Postscript About Adult Services

Helping your kids to enjoy reading and develop intellectually is good incentive for taking them on regular visits to the local public library. But there can be plenty in it for you too. While your children are browsing, attending a special program, or working on a research paper, **take the opportunity to browse,** too. There are lots of books and magazines to delight and inform you. If your local public library doesn't have the book you're looking for, chances are good it can be obtained on loan from another library. And don't miss the records and movie videocassettes usually free on loan.

Whatever kind of information you may need, don't overlook the public library as a likely source. Whether you're planning a major purchase, writing a resume, or wondering if your new car is a lemon, your library has many resources to help. There are consumer magazines and buyers' guides that compare products and services, tell you how to shop wisely, and how to complain effectively, if you need to. There is also information on job opportunities in your area and nationwide, as well as on how to prepare and market yourself. In recent years, libraries have become distribution points for tax forms, and many offer seminars and other free assistance in preparing tax returns.

Most libraries today have **information and referral services,** so even if they can't give you the help you need, they'll point you in the right direction. Do you need to know where to register to vote? How to sue in small claims court? What housing and special services for seniors are available in your community?

How to say "happy birthday" in Gaelic? The list of questions and concerns with which libraries can help is endless. In addition, libraries often have community bulletin boards that tell about local club activities, concerts, car pool locators, classes, and other events. If you have any difficulty finding what you need, remember that the librarian is there to serve you, so ask for help.

Finally, many public libraries today sponsor classes where you can get literacy training, study for high school equivalency exams, or earn college credits.There are lots of less formal classes, too, on everything from gardening and photography to computer literacy and—most challenging of all—raising children.

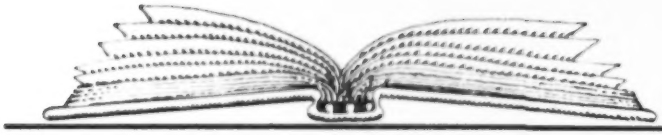
For More Information

Notable Children's Books. For most recent annual list, send 30 cents to: American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611.

Books for Children. Selected by Library of Congress as best books published recently for preschool through junior high school-aged children. Send $1 to Consumer Information Center, Department 116V, Pueblo, CO 81009.

The Horn Book. Published six times a year, it has reviews, articles and special columns about the best new books for children and young adults. For information, write: The Horn Book, Inc., 31 St. James Avenue, Boston, MA 02116-4167.

Learning Disabilities—Library Directions. A packet of materials for professionals working with children with learning difficulties. Request from: Association for Library Service to Children, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611.



Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Parents Can Do. Recent research findings and practical advice on how to help your children become good readers. Send 50 cents to: Consumer Information Center, Department 459V, Pueblo, CO 81009.

The International Reading Association (IRA) publishes a number of brochures for parents. Single copies are available free and bulk copies at a nominal cost. For titles and ordering information, write to: IRA, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8130, Newark, DE 19714–8139.

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc., publishes a number of parent guide brochures available for 50 cents each. For titles and other ordering information, write to: Reading Is Fundamental, Inc., Publications Department, Smithsonian Institution, 600 Maryland Avenue SW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20024.

For a free information package for children or adults, write to: The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20542.

Also check at your local public library for:

- Book lists published by the local or State library.
- *Choosing Books for Children* by Betsy Hearne. (Delacorte Press)
- *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading* by Nancy Larrick. (Pocket Books)
- *The Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease. (Penguin Handbooks)
- *For Reading Out Loud* by Margaret Kimmel and Elizabeth Segel. (Dell/ Delacorte Books)

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Education Information

Your local library, of course, has further information on this topic and related ones. In addition, you may visit an Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) service provider. ERIC, the largest education database in the world, makes education information easily available to the public. For information about ERIC, contact your library or write: ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, 4350 East-West Highway, Suite 1100, Bethesda, MD 20814–4475, or call (301) 656–9723.

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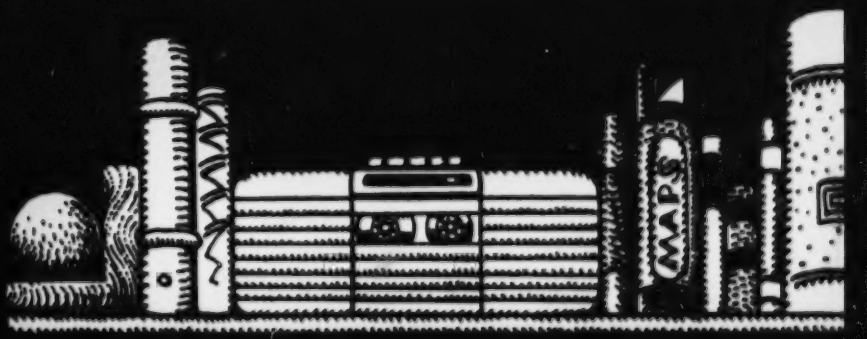

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